DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 108 265 CS 501 065

AUTHOR Wilson, Gary B.
TITLE Women in Politics: Images and Voter Support.
PUB DATE Apr 75
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Assn. (Chicago, April, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Elections; *Females; Feminism; Political Attitudes; *Political Influences; *Politics; *Sex Differences; Sex Discrimination; Social Attitudes; State Surveys; Voter Registration; *Voting
IDENTIFIERS Connecticut

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was threefold: (1) to investigate the general image of women who are active in politics and compare that image with the general image of men who are politically active, (2) to examine the general area of sex-related voting patterns when a major woman condidate is involved, and (3) to determine whether or not a female candidate influences the major issues in an election. Telephone interview data were collected from 82 voter registrants on the Connecticut races for governor and state representative. Newspaper content analysis was made for three Connecticut races: governor, state senator, and state representative. The results indicated that there were great differences in the perceived honesty and fairness in favor of women as opposed to men in politics. The issues raised in two of the three races studied showed no apparent sex-related influence. Furthermore, no sex-related voting patterns were apparent. The results further suggest that women are viable candidates who can run and win on an equal basis with men and that in the past they have lacked opportunities rather than qualifications. (LL)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED108265

WOMEN IN POLITICS: IMAGES AND VOTER SUPPORT

By

Gary B. Wilson

Communication Division
University of Connecticut

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Gary B. Wilson

TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER.

International Communication Association

1975

CS 501 065

RATIONALE

A search of a very recent bibliography on political communication (Kaid, Sanders, and Hirsch, 1974) indicates that little has been done in terms of studying the increasingly active role women candidates are taking in American politics. The search located only four entries directly concerned with women. Two of the four dealt specifically with Shirley Temple Black's race for the U.S. Senate. One of those was a magazine article (Duscha, 1967) and the other a book (Minott, 1968). The other two entries consisted of an article on women in recent Presidential campaigns (Barclay, 1970) and a section of a general book on campaigning (Joyner, 1971). These last two entries focused on the role of women campaigning to get men elected to office.

A search of a standard book on campaign practices and tactics (Nimo, 1970) shows only three index entries related to women. The first refers to a picture of Jacqueline Kennedy placing a telephone call urging women to watch a political broadcast by her husband during the 1960 Presidential campaign (p. 132). The second told of publicity for a phone call from John Kennedy to Mrs. Martin Luther King in which he promised to try to aid her recently jailed husband (p. 28). The final entry related to Edward Kennedy's use of television inhis explanation of the events surrounding the death of Mary Jo Kopechne (p. 188). In short, prior to the 1974 elections, there seemed to be little known about women as political candidates. There seemed to be little interest, in terms of research activity, in changing that condition.

Most of the lack of interest on the part of scholars can probably be explained by the fact that prior to 1974 no woman had ever been elected governor on her own reputation. Few women had reached the U.S. Senate (none are there now). This means that with the single exception of the Governor of Connecticut, no woman has won a major statewide election in the past 6 years.

This lack of women as major candidates would imply that they lack what Nimmo termed availability. He stated that there were several basic factors to availability that must be possessed by any serious candidate: (1) a desire to run; (2) positive characteristics ascribed to him/her by the potential voters; (3) positive achieved experience; (4) a contrived image which meets the expectations of the voters;* and, (5) political resources--money and personal support (Nimmo, 1970, 11-15).

Three of the aspects of availability can be disposed of rather quickly. There can be little doubt that there are numbers of women who have the desire to run for office. The fact that in the past many have been used as candidates in elections that were hopelessly lost attests to the desire to run. There are many women who have gained considerable experience at lower level political office who have the achieved experience to qualify for advancement in political status. With money and proper handling there is no reason to believe that it would not be possible for a female candidate to present a proper contrived image before the voters.

The political resources would appear to be available if women possessed the final aspect of availability--positive characteristics ascribed to her by the potential voters. That is, if it could be shown to potential supporters that a woman candidate had all the characteristics needed to win in a specific election, there is reason to expect that financial support could be gained. Stereotyping often attributes several characteristics to women that would serve to handicap them in the political arena. Women are sometimes said to be weaker mentally and

---

*According to Nimmo, a contrived image is the "convey[ing] of the illusion of positive characteristics even in the face of less glamorous realities. This means the candidate must select and emphasize the most appealing of his qualities, publicize them widely and repetitiously, and at the same time play down any limitations" (p. 13).

physically, less rational, and more passive or less dynamic than men. In terms of political characteristics these would seem to be negative attributes and if they were held by a substantial portion of the potential electorate they would certainly lower the availability rating of female candidates.

One purpose of this study was to investigate the general image of women who are active in politics and compare that image with the general image of men who are active in politics. In this period of reaction to male corruption exposed by the Watergate and related scandals, is there any unusual advantage to being a female candidate?

A second purpose of this study was to look at the general area of sex-related voting patterns when there is a major woman candidate involved. Does the presence of a woman as a candidate lead to any unusual clustering of women's votes for that party?

A third purpose was to look at the types of issues raised. Does the presence of women as candidates change the emphasis of the campaign in any way that can be directly attributed to the fact that women are running?

Telephone interview data was collected on the races for Governor and State Representative. The Governor's race featured a female candidate against a male candidate. The race for State Representative featured a woman who had been active in women's rights against a woman who did not portray herself as a supporter of women's liberation groups; in fact who, on occasion, stated that she could not agree with many of the goals of those groups.

METHODS

Telephone Survey

A sample of 150 names was drawn from the voter registration list compiled for the previous year's local election. Forty-five names were eliminated because

no current address or phone number could be located. A substantial portion of this group appeared to be students who have since left the University area. Of the remaining 105 subjects, completed interview questionnaires were obtained from 82 (78%). Twenty-three interviews were incomplete because of subject refusal or failure to reach the desired party (22%).

Because of developing sensitivity to political polling, the interviewer was given only the phone number and sex of the desired respondent. In this way we could honestly assure the respondent anonymity. It was felt that the possible loss of precision in maintaining the sample could be offset by an improved completion rate.

Each interviewer was instructed to try at least three times during different times of the day before removing the number from the sample.

The interviewers introduced themselves as college students working on an election communication project for the Communication Research Group at the University of Connecticut.

The questionnaire opened by asking the subject to name the candidates for each of the races--Governor and State Representative. Then each subject was asked about: (1) his political communication with friends; (2) newspaper usage; and (3) electronic media usage. These questions were intended to assess which media are truly available for candidate use in election campaigning in the sample area.

The scales used to measure the image of women in politics, men in politics, Ella Grasso and Robert Steele (the two Gubernatorial candidates) were: Honest-Dishonest, Fair-Unfair, Active-Passive, Strong-Weak, and Rational-Intuitive (Osgood, et al., 1957).

Each scale was presented in two steps. First the respondent was asked which of the polar words best fit the stimulus object. For example, "Which word best represents your view of women who are active in politics--Honest or

Dishonest?" After the respondent chose one, he was then asked "How well do you feel it fits--Very well, quite well, or slightly well?" This scoring system was 1 to 7 with, for example, very honest being 7 and very dishonest being 1.

The next set of questions asked for the major issue in the Gubernatorial and State Representatives race.

Finally, each interview was concluded with questions on party registration (to check validity of sampling) and voting intention in the races for Governor and State Representative.

Content Analysis

The two major daily newspapers which serve the voting district were used as the source of information on the issues appearing before the public. The home delivered edition was used for everyday of the eight weeks preceding the election. A brief (one week) attempt to monitor the television newscasts indicated that they were redundant with, but less complete than, the newspapers. Because we were interested in the range of issues it was concluded that we could obtain the information we needed from the newspaper clippings.

Each article concerned with the election was analyzed for the name of the candidate, issues, and candidate position on the issues. This information was collected for 3 separate races: Governor, State Senate, and State Representative.

RESULTS

Survey Study

As Table 1 indicates, there were great differences in the perceived honesty and fairness in favor of women in politics over men in politics (Honesty $t_d = 5.16$, $p < .001$; Fiarness $t_d = 3.86$, $p < .001$) (Winer, 1971). None of the other three comparisons indicated stable differences. Because the unaffiliated vote is so

critical in most elections, the data from that subsample was analyzed separately. As could be expected from the data in Table 1, the independents strongly favored women over men on honesty and fairness (Honesty $t_d = 4.23$, $p < .001$; Fairness $t_d = 3.82$, $p < .01$). None of the other three comparisons revealed stable differences.

In the comparison between the two active candidates, the data indicates a reliable difference only in the rating of fairness ($t_d = 2.49$, $p < .02$). Again, in the unaffiliated sample Grasso had a significantly superior rating in fairness ($t_d = 2.50$, p .05). The difference in honesty favored Grasso though it was short of statistical significance ($t_d = 1.76$, $p < .10$).

In comparing each candidate against the appropriate sex stereotype, the data indicates that the male candidate was not irretrievable handicapped. Steele was rated significantly higher than the general male stereotype on the two scales that had shown a male handicap in comparison to the female. He was rated significantly higher on honesty ($t_d = 6.16$, $p < .001$) and fairness ($t_d = 3.60$, $p < .01$).

Sex of the candidate was never mentioned as an issue in the Gubernatorial race.

The stated intention of the voters allowed prediction of the actual outcome within 2% (Table 2). This would tend to validate both the sample and the responses obtained.

Content Analysis

In the Gubernatorial race the collection of newspaper clippings indicated a difference on only two issues--taxes (the Republican issue) and the State Public Utilities Commission (responsible for control of utility rates in the state and the Democratic target). Neither of these issues would appear to have any sex related connotations.

In the State Senate race between two female candidates, the primary differences were in emphasis on unemployment (Democratic Candidate and member of the finance committee) and state health care (Republican candidate and a registered nurse). Again, this race shows no necessary connection between the sex of the candidates and the issues emphasized.

The final race to be considered was for State Representative. In this race one candidate had been active in women's rights and campaigned for women's votes. Though the newspaper clippings did not show a difference in issues (neither got a significant amount of newspaper coverage) the mailed campaign literature told of her involvement in equal rights campaigns. An oddity in reported vote intention was that only two of 16 males who stated their preference said they would vote for this candidate. These two voters were registered Republicans who stated they were voting for all the Republican candidates.

DISCUSSION

The data in this study do not support the political folklore that women lack a particular element of availability--positive perceived characteristics. In a test of perceived characteristics of "women who are active in politics" against "men who are active in politics" the data suggest that it was women who had the advantage in the most recent election. The data suggest that women were perceived to be more honest and more fair than men in politics. In areas where it is sometimes assumed men candidates have an advantage, perceived strength, activity, and rationality, there was no apparent advantage for men according to this data.

Where this data is most important is among the voters not affiliated with either major party. In this study the unaffiliated voters reflected the general advantage for women in honesty and fairness with no disadvantage anywhere across the other three scales.

In a test of images of the male and female candidates for Governor, the advantage for fairness held up while the generalized difference favoring females on honesty did not hold up for the specific candidates. This would suggest that while the potential voters had a less favorable image of male politicians in the first general election after the Watergate scandal, a particular candidate could overcome the general stigma in terms of his image. While this possibility is important, a more important general implication is that part of the assumed handicap of a female candidate appears to be a myth. There is no support in this data for the assumption that women politicians are viewed as weaker, more passive, or less rational.

Based on the outcome of the election, of course, it is strongly suggested that female candidates can progress up the political ladder on the same basis as men if they are given the opportunity by the party.

The study data and the election result in the race for State Representative suggests that though women carry no necessary disadvantage because of their sex, raising the issue might well cost more in terms of male votes than it will gain in female votes. The issues raised in two of the three races studied showed no apparent sex-related influence. In the Gubernatorial race, sex was never mentioned as a campaign or election issue. Media coverage of the State Senate race also revealed no apparent sex-related campaign issues. It was only the State Representative's race that indicated sex as a significant variable. In this race one of the candidates attempted to use her previous activities for women's rights and it appeared to work to her disadvantage.

The suggestion supported by this research is that women are viable candidates who can run and win on an equal basis with men. What they seem to have lacked in the past was the opportunity, not the qualifications.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Barclay, M. T., "Distaff campaigning in the 1964 and 1968 Presidential elections," Central States Speech Journal, 21 (1970), pp. 117-122.

Duscha, J., "How do you fight Shirley Temple?" Reporter, 37 (Nov. 2, 1967), pp. 21-23.

Joyner, C. The American Politician. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1971.

Kaid, L. L., K. R. Sanders, and R. O. Hirsch. Political Campaign Communication: A Bibliography and Guide to the Literature. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1974.

Minott, R. G. The Sinking of the Lollipop. San Francisco: Diablo Press, 1968.

Nimmo, D. The Political Persuaders. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, 1970

Osgood, C. E., G. J. Suci, and P. H. Tannenbaum. The Measurement of Meaning. Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1957.

Winer, B. J. Statistical Principles in Experimental Design. 2nd Edition. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations of image assessment scales.

	Total		Dems		Reps		Unaff.	
	$\bar{X}$	s.d.	$\bar{X}$	s.d.	$\bar{X}$	s.d.	$\bar{X}$	s.d.
Honest-Dishonest								
Women in politics	5.77	1.03	5.87	0.89	5.44	1.25	5.84	1.12
Men in politics	4.73	1.59	4.78	1.55	5.33	1.33	4.05	1.72
Ella Grasso	5.86	1.29	5.91	1.24	5.22	1.70	6.37	0.60
Robert Steele	5.91	1.02	5.78	1.00	6.28	0.83	5.90	1.20
Fair-Unfair								
Women in politics	5.78	0.98	5.71	1.10	5.67	0.77	6.05	0.85
Men in politics	4.90	1.50	4.93	1.48	5.33	1.24	4.42	1.71
Ella Grasso	6.02	0.92	5.91	1.04	6.00	0.77	6.32	0.67
Robert Steele	5.54	1.31	5.33	1.38	6.17	0.79	5.42	1.39
Active-Passive								
Women in politics	5.78	1.20	5.98	1.08	5.22	1.11	5.84	1.42
Men in politics	5.77	1.35	5.67	1.28	5.89	1.41	5.68	1.53
Ella Grasso	6.08	1.30	5.91	1.58	5.94	0.94	6.63	0.50
Robert Steele	6.29	0.84	6.24	0.91	6.39	0.85	6.32	0.67
Strong-Weak								
Women in politics	5.46	1.35	5.62	1.35	4.56	1.50	5.95	0.70
Men in politics	5.35	1.38	5.07	1.48	5.72	1.07	5.68	1.29
Ella Grasso	5.86	1.16	5.71	1.41	5.89	0.83	6.21	0.63
Robert Steele	6.00	0.97	5.89	0.91	6.33	0.84	5.95	1.18
Rational-Intuitive								
Women in politics	5.10	1.54	5.16	1.51	4.61	1.61	5.42	1.50
Men in politics	5.34	1.30	5.29	1.34	5.67	0.84	5.16	1.54
Ella Grasso	5.50	1.47	5.33	1.62	5.56	1.15	5.84	1.34
Robert Steele	5.49	1.34	5.38	1.51	5.89	0.76	5.37	1.30
	(N = 82)		(N = 45)		(N = 18)		(N = 19)	

Table 2. Stated vote intention by sex and political party of respondent.*

a. Governor's Race

	Male	Female	
Grasso	19	20	39
Steele	9	7	16

	Dem.	Rep.	Unaff.	
Grasso	27	1	11	39
Steele	4	11	1	16
Undecided & Refused	14	6	7	27

b. Representative's Race

	Male	Female	
Goodwin	14	17	31
Taylor	2	7	9

	Dem.	Rep.	Unaff.	
Goodwin	23	3	5	31
Taylor	1	7	1	9
Undecided & Refused	21	8	13	42

*All tables significant $p < .05$ (X^2). However, since the Democratic party was an obvious and easy winner in the sample area, the statistical level of significance is primarily determined by political party and the sex differences are not clearly tested statistically.